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ABSTRACT

This report on the role of the arts in progressive and experimental education suggests that, despite certain notable exceptions, alternative schools have traded the old formalism for a new disorder that is unfriendly to some (though not all) elements of successful arts instruction: critical self-consciousness, periodic solitude, and stringent discipline. Although noting that alternative schools have served as catalysts to change in arts education, the report concludes that the arts are withering decisively in secondary, though less irrevocably in elementary, alternative schools. The report also describes four types of out-of-school alternative arts programs: the open studio, the artist as school teacher, the student as apprentice, and the student as teacher. It concludes that these approaches bring a new vitality to the teaching of the arts and that the engagement of working professionals in the education of children is an exceptionally promising practice. (GT)

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THE ARTS IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS:

SOME OBSERVATIONS

by

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THE ARTS IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS: SOME OBSERVATIONS

Abstract

This study of the role of the arts in progressive and experimental education suggests that, despite certain notable exceptions, alternative schools have traded the old formalism for a newer disorder. They have, however, engendered one exceptionally promising practice, the engagement of working professionals in the education of children.

Alternative schools are loyal to the "utopian trinity: freedom, individuality, and the diversity which must result from many individualities". They have served as catalysts in contributions to arts education techniques. However, the arts are withering decisively in secondary, though less irrevocably in elementary alternative schools. The restless motion and relentless sociability of these schools are characteristics unfriendly to certain (not all) elements of successful arts instruction: critical self-consciousness, some solitude, stringent discipline.

The report describes four promising techniques: the open studio, the artist as school teacher, the student as apprentice, and the student as teacher. Crafts, visual and plastic arts, and to less extent, creative writing develop well and sometimes flourish under these conditions. Music and dance generally languish because both demand discipline, precision in deciphering special notation, and careful, if not tedious, practice -- instruction techniques alternative schools resist. With respect to both successful and degenerating programs, the main criticism remains that "explanation has been systematically ignored; no attempt has been made to understand, in logical or psychological terms, why one approach works and another fails, or even to examine what it means for a technique to 'work'".

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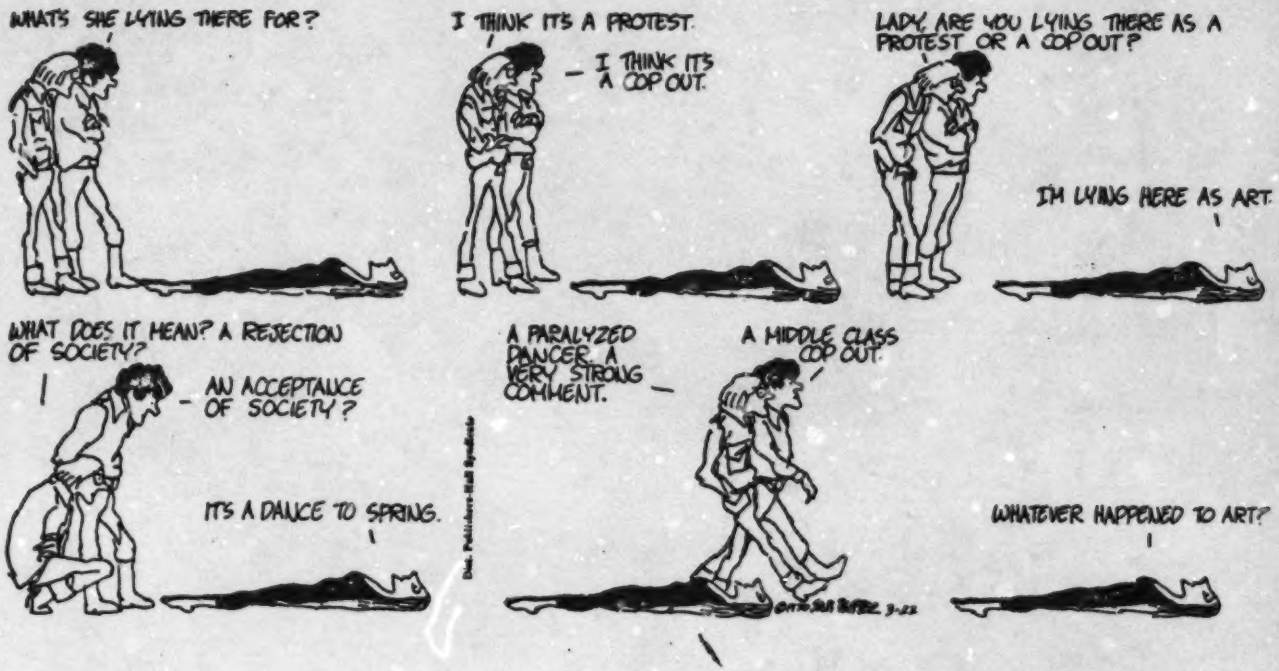
WHAT'S SHE LYING THERE FOR?
I THINK IT'S A PROTEST.
I THINK IT'S A COP OUT.
LADY, ARE YOU LYING THERE AS A PROTEST OR A COP OUT?
I'M LYING HERE AS ART.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN? A REJECTION OF SOCIETY?
AN ACCEPTANCE OF SOCIETY?
IT'S A DANCE TO SPRING.
A PARALYZED DANCER. A VERY STRONG COMMENT.
A MIDDLE CLASS COP OUT.
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ART?

(C) 1970, Jules Feiffer
Courtesy of Publishers-Hall Syndicate.

The state of the arts in the public schools is even more deplorable than the state of everything else. Friends of the arts, then, have reason to welcome the educational disestablishmentarianism currently astir on the North American continent. Suddenly, from Canada to Mexico, "alternative schools" are ubiquitous. Humanistic in conception, Utopian in outlook, these schools would seem to provide a natural home for the arts. That, at least, was the assumption which led me to visit dozens of such institutions, and to study the manifestos of hundreds more. What follows is an informal account of a year's observations.

"Alternative schools" has become a generic designation encompassing a broad range of experimental institutions, public, private, and denominational. Virtually every major metropolitan school system now supports at least one unconventional school; almost every state and province, even those as educationally recalcitrant as Alabama and Virginia, now claim at least one free school. Thickets of such experiments flourish on both coasts; clusters surround the great university centers of Canada and the American mid-West. But significant numbers, following the lead of earlier Utopians, have retreated from the cities to the open land, to farms, ranches, and wilderness country. Rural or urban, they include Summerhill and Leichestershire variants, community and parent cooperatives, drop-out centers and live-in communes, peripatetic academies and ecological survival institutes. Although such endeavors tend to be aggressively independent, they have nonetheless already spawned a national and several regional information exchanges, a weekly newsletter, a handful of employment centers, and

a growing number of producers of avant-garde educational materials.

Because such schools often exist on a shoestring and sometimes vanish as abruptly as they materialized, it is impossible to estimate how many lives they touch -- how many children, how many teachers, how many parents. In any case, their interest does not rest on numbers alone, but rather on the influence which they may exert -- indeed, intend to exert -- upon conventional patterns of schooling. Although a few are truly counterschools, viewing themselves less as alternatives than rebukes to existing institutions, most regard themselves as harbingers of future mass education. For this reason, although some receive visitors in such numbers as to strain their resources, they continue to entertain with the cordiality of missionaries. Characteristically, then, alternative schools are serious, self-conscious, and principled. They are prepared to resist charges of amateurism or enthusiasm with a set of rational and internally consistent premises from which their practice derives.

These premises are of special concern to art educators. They fall into two classes: assumptions about human growth and learning on the one hand, and on the other, a set of values which those assumptions are presumed to decree. The accord between these two may be less than complete. "Every individual learns best through his own personal experience", notes one school. "We believe in the right of every individual to be free to experience the world around him in his own way." One may wonder whether the opening clause provides sufficient warrant for the concluding imperative, or whether, in fact, that "right" conceals a nest of unexpressed and prior con-

victions. In any case, the real interest of the statement resides in its implied values. Freedom, individuality, and the diversity which must result from many individualities -- these are the Utopian trinity, the fundamentals which, however variously interpreted and realized, command universal allegiance.

Freedom in the alternative school often means not merely avoidance of coercion, but absence of all restraints except those required for health and safety and for preservation of the rights of others. The free school student can, for the most part, do exactly as he chooses (and that includes choosing to do nothing) provided he does not endanger himself or unduly exasperate his fellows. Even compulsory attendance laws, which apply to experimental schools operating within public school systems, are likely to be loosely observed.

The emphasis on individuality and diversity dictates that students be able to select according to taste and interest from a rich mix of activities. Even more important, it requires that those activities all be judged equally worthy. This Benthamite proposition engenders marked uneasiness among conventional schoolmen and probably contributes generously to the disorientation which afflicts the first-time free school visitor. After all, not only is push-pin as good as Pushkin, but making jelly or making out is on a par with making music, a course in astrology is equivalent to one in astrophysics, and an hour's T-group is neither better nor worse than an hour's tedium. The brochure of a California school makes the point merely by its choice of rhetorical style ; the relentless series of parallel units insists on the equality of each of its members:

> Students are involved in such areas as mountaineering, creative sewing and design, organic gardening, computer building, word sensitivity, minority studies, existential philosophy, yoga, meditation, sex education, pottery, weaving, goemetry, diving, and gourmet cooking.

This list is not uncharacteristic.

One further value, widely held among alternative schools, deserves to be noted. Since Dewey, American educators have proclaimed their interest in "the whole child" while in reality attending only to a narrow range of behavior. The new Utopians, attempting to redress this imbalance, place human encounter and emotional growth at the center of their concerns. They seek to foster intuition and insight, gusto and passion, self-actualization and self-expression. As one experimentalist writes:

> ...love and freedom are integral parts of education, as they are of life. Allowing children to be happy emotionally and psychologically and to develop their full potential as human beings are more important to us than forcing them to learn to read or write and do arithemetic and homework. Happy children will become happy adults, and happy adults do not make war, commit anti-social acts, or destroy other living things.

Not every alternative school goes quite so far. Many -- especially those within public school systems, but by no means only those -- retain some authority, impose some structure, or insist on some academic preparation. Often an all-elective school will establish distribution requirements. Or an elementary school may impose formal reading instruction upon non-readers approaching middle-school age.[1] And secondary schools commonly offer appropriate instruction for those seeking college admission; in such cases, college requirements

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[1]But see Neil Postman's argument for abolishing reading instruction entirely in "The Politics of Reading", Harvard Educational Review, 40 (May, 1970), 244-252.

may impose stringent limits upon a student's choices. The descriptions which follow, therefore, should be distrusted; for every generalization, a dozen counterinstances could be cited. At best, these examples represent frequent, but by no means universal practice. Alternative schools are as idiosyncratic as the children they cherish.

Individuality, diversity, intuition, expressiveness -- in such schools, surely the arts must flower. Where none need tolerate laborious "appreciation" classes, where no one is ordered to practice (or else), and where each is encouraged to celebrate his own idiom, there surely shall the Muses dwell. Yet, every value implies a rejection of its opposite. Where freedom and expressiveness reign, other qualities retreat. In too many alternative schools freedom has been purchased at the cost of discipline and commitment. Some students flit restlessly from one to another transitory attraction, sampling a smorgasbord of interests and activities. Others sink phlegmatically into apathy and ennui. Few muster the doggedness and purpose to pursue a problem, aesthetic or intellectual, as far as it may lead. Younger children, oddly enough, seem less vulnerable to this infection than their adolescent siblings. (Utopians count this as evidence of the damage inflicted on adolescents by prior conventional schooling.) In elementary schools founded on the British integrated-day model -- in schools, that is, which bulge with a heterogeneity of tools, books, paints, games, scraps, records, and other materials freely available to children -- pupils often produce paintings, crafts, sculpture, and poetry of astonishing quality. Even here, however, music languishes, as does dance, the latter perhaps because it requires a disciplined group (rather than an interested individual); the former certainly because mastery of an instrument and a notation necessitates

direct instruction of a kind such schools eschew. And of course it still remains to be seen whether free school youngsters entering adolescence will continue to avoid the temptations of frivolity and self-indulgence.

If freedom has its price, so too does social growth, which is often purchased at the cost of privacy and silence. Free schools are noisy. Even their designated quiet zones -- libraries, meditation spaces, listening rooms -- rustle more than most such places with the sounds of aggregate human living. Many secondary schools have student lounges, or smoking rooms, or retreats where, invariably, the sound system operates at such a volume as to preclude conversation and to screen out other noises. Although there students can withdraw from the unremitting social pressures and intrusive demands of others, their retreat is at best partial: they must still conceal their interior life, avoid eye to eye contact, maintain an inscrutable mask. The student who writes or sketches commits a social indiscretion; he draws attention to himself and thus disrupts the tacit pretense at isolation. Some wealthy schools, wired up for electronic learning, provide a few sound-proof listening booths and a number of less claustrophobic audio stations where students can plug into temporary privacy. That listening booths, where available, are in constant use and must be reserved well in advance is scarcely surprising. But experimental schools are poor for the most part, and count themselves lucky to possess a single quiet area. In most elementary schools even this minimal amenity is lacking. Of the "silence, exile, and cunning" which Joyce took to be the conditions of art, the first two are reserved for the onset of puberty.

Nor does the faculty fare better. Indeed, teaching in a free school demands far more than the normal allotment of dedication and constancy. Since the job requires the teacher to be ceaselessly, patiently, cheerfully accessible to kids, his day is likely to disintegrate into an incoherent mix of harassment, crisis, and distraction. Whatever its personal rewards -- and some, it should be emphasized, find these immeasurably rich -- adult life in alternative schools lacks aesthetic and intellectual focus. The restless motion and relentless sociability which characterize the students' style impose themselves willy nilly upon the staff. The result, of course, is to deny students those models of sustained and disciplined purpose which might invite emulation. In alternative schools, sometimes by accident but more often by design, the psychological tempo of the student prevails.

Insofar, then, as the arts demand of their practitioners stern concentration, periodic isolation and withdrawal, even on occasion blind resistance to social proprieties, to that extent they have suffered in alternative schools. Paradoxically, they may have suffered most in those schools which are most free -- free, that is, of adult authority and externally-imposed structure. In such schools new tyrannies, subtler than their predecessors, may breed. Indecision, indolence, and indifference can paralyze aspiration; disorder and distraction can compel and prohibit as effectively as rules, schedul s, and penalties. Especially as reinforced by other affirmatives -- for example, the constant promotion of interpersonal responsiveness and community participation -- the freedom of alternative schools can prove to be merely an alternative coercion. This is not to deny that such schools honor achievement in the arts. On the contrary, they celebrate its appearance more fervently than do convention-

al institutions. But their celebration is at the same time an acknowledgement of the obstacles to creation in such an environment.

By contrast, what flourishes in alternative schools are the crafts: leather and metal work, pottery, textiles. That this should be so seems altogether predictable. In part, it responds to economic need. Free schools are poor and craftwork is salable. In part it responds to an antitechnological bias as well as to an impulse for self-sufficiency and simplicity not unlike that which characterized American Utopias of the nineteenth century. But its fundamental impetus is social. Handicrafts require neither the isolation nor the concentration demanded by the fine arts. In fact, nothing is more companionable than an evening gathering of craftsmen around a country hearth, and this scene is as regularly reenacted in residential free schools as is evening study hall in traditional institutions. That the products of such communion are of uneven quality matters little; what counts is the process, not the product.

Yet a genuinely aesthetic motive is sometimes apparent as well. In those instances, emphasis shifts to the artifact, and the esteem accorded the craftsman represents a tribute to precision, inventiveness, and artisanship. Where these values prevail, the boundary between art and craft may blur. At a Quaker farm-school high in the New Hampshire hills, my query about fine arts facilities produced a tour of the Meeting Room where one of two pianos was housed, a visit to the pottery shed and adjacent outdoor kiln, and an exploration of the subterranean studio where seven imposing looms all but overpowered a lone easel, a small sculpture table, and a tired photographic display. The designs emerging on the looms, however, were visually striking and technically adept. Here the free school style, modified

by traditional Quaker concerns, had yielded a unique amalgam of the useful and the aesthetic. Still, that combination, although found now and then, is as rare in free schools as elsewhere.

Nonetheless, the prospect for the fine arts is not uniformly bleak. Experimental schools sometimes offer real alternatives in aesthetic learning. Although few have attempted to educate students as potential audiences, some have evolved thoughtful, even imaginative, means for encouraging and refining the practice of the arts.[2] And where schools persist in neglecting this task, after-school alternatives -- compensatory education for the aesthetically deprived -- are emerging. These share the characteristic goals and style of the free school. Whether in school or out, four approaches predominate.

The Open Studio

The open studio is exactly what its name implies -- a workroom equipped with the tools and materials of one or more of the arts. Some schools will station an instructor or other adult in the studio, but most eschew supervision on the grounds that an adult presence curtails exploration and encourages dependency. If a teacher is on hand, he is likely to remain inconspicuous, intervening only if summoned or if equipment is egregiously abused. Supervised or not, the open studio

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[2]Implicit in this approach (and explicit, too, in the emphasis on learning by doing) is the assumption that potential audiences should be educated by doing what the artist does. Whether this practice also implies, as Dewey argued, that reader and listener are in some sense author and composer manque, recreating the work in the act of responding to it, is a question schools prefer to ignore. And they are equally indifferent to the difficulties of reconciling Dewey's notions about art with the Benthamite egalitarianism that informs the free school curriculum. Although Dewey is enjoying a new vogue among free schools, one suspects that he suffers the same fate there as elsewhere; he is still, alas, more quoted than read.

remains open to all students throughout the school day and often beyond it. No registrations, authorizations, passes, signature, or other clerical impediments bar the way; the student is free to attend his Muse whenever she beckons.

The open studio has flourished in progressive nursery schools for years and, under the influence of British practice, has become increasingly common in elementary education. Among secondary schools, although still a rarity, it has at least won acceptance as a sound practice. And in alert suburbs the open studio has by now become a mandatory feature of new public school construction. Generally it is one element of a more comprehensive system which includes open laboratories and industrial shops; sometimes, unfortunately, it remains the poor relation in that family. Timberlane Regional High School is perhaps not untypical. Built five years ago to serve the five hundred children of four tiny rural communities, none of which had ever boasted a secondary school, Timberlane includes two spacious and well outfitted open shops for wood and metal work, three superbly equipped open laboratories for biology, chemistry, and physics, and a single crowded art studio. The latter, though nominally open, is scheduled for classes during much of the day, so that its accessibility is substantially reduced. By contrast, the Sanborn Middle School in affluent Concord reserves the entire basement of its two-story plant for the arts. Here, in an architectural setting as elegant as any on the continent, alcoves are equipped for easel painting, for wood, metal, and clay sculpture, and for pottery, leaving available for elective use a large central space with moveable work tables. In a studio of these proportions, two or three classes (limited, as a rule, to ten children) can meet simul-

taneously without disruption of privacy and without curtailing spontaneous use of the facility by individuals.

Obviously the open studio is best suited to the visual arts. Nowhere is dance popular enough to merit its own space, while music requires rather different arrangements. Creative writing, however, remains a puzzle. Two Newton teachers claim considerable success with a modified version of the open writing lab. Although institutional rules require that students register for and attend the lab, once enrolled they are under no compulsion to write nor will they receive formal instruction in technique. On an ordinary day, perhaps a quarter of the class, gathered in corners or on the fringes of the room, will be otherwise occupied. The rest, sprawled over tables, hunched above typewrters, or strung out on window seats according to their bent, will be in the throes of composition. What they compose is under their own control, as is the amount and kind of assistance they receive. Some students will submit work in progress to a friend or teacher; some will display only finished artifacts. Some seem to want the merest nod of approbation, some a detailed critique, some the applause of the entire group. Although flexible enough to accommodate such diverse preferences, the laboratory setting nonetheless puts the writer on public view, a circumstance which would seem to multiply the psychic discomforts of composition. For the graphic artist, on the other hand, such a milieu seems nourishing. The young observer in the studio can incorporate in the most casual and offhand fashion a rich knowledge of media and technique. His fellows are, as a rule, happy to discuss or to demonstrate. If several students confront related problems, they can constitute themselves an informal class and request appropriate instruction. But per-

haps most desirable of all is the opportunity afforded by the open studio to explore at leisure, to pose one's own problems, to fail, if need be, and try again or try another way, always without penalty to the ego or damage to the academic record.

The Artist as Schoolteacher

The open studio system abandons formal instruction or at least minimizes it. This, of course, is consistent with the more general goal of reducing constraints and expanding choices. But at the same time it reinforces -- or in any case does not ameliorate -- the aimlessness and dilettantism which may afflict the free school student. Least of all does it offer him a model on which to pattern his own behavior, or provide him with a sense of the practicing artist as an embodied human being. Adding to these considerations the further one that the practitioner is likely to prove the most ardent advocate of his calling, many schools have sought to attract working artists to their faculties. Estimating the success fo such recruiting efforts is precarious, since the distinction between artists-who-teach and teachers-who-paint or act or dance is necessarily a fine one, ultimately decidable only by the practitioner himself. Still, certain patterns emerge.

The most common is one borrowed from university practice -- that of the artist-in-residence. In return for work space, and perhaps board and housing, the professional makes himself available to students. He will offer tutelage if requested but, from the school's point of view, his most important function is merely to be visible and, within reason, amiable while doing his own thing. Obviously, too, such activity as is observable will vary in quality from school to school and, within the school, from month to month, artists being men of disparate talents and

uncertain inspiration. Thus, although the Sudbury Valley School numbers among the staff of twelve a musicologist, a painter, a sculptor, and a photographer, a random visit may find the art studio bare, devoid even of signs of recent occupation, while the only music emanates from the stereo set in the smoking room. Even when the artist's activity is prominent, his apparent effect on students may remain negligible. In fact, so perverse are the ways of adolescents that the continuing presence of a practicing artist -- his very ordinariness in the school setting -- may discourage rather than excite students' interest. Nonetheless, the salutary influence of a devoted professional upon a youthful community can scarcely be discounted. If he never answered a question nor offered an explanation (though it is hard to imagine that happening), his example as a man who takes himself and his work seriously ought to guarantee his welcome.

By contrast, the visiting artist imported into the school for a single performance appears as an exotic and can exert a lively impact. Unfortunately, the impression often conveyed by such visitors is a compound of glamour and mystification, designed to dazzle rather than enlighten. The very conditions of the visit may thrust the artist into the role of entertainer rather than of teacher. Even if he resists the temptation to preserve a professional distance between himself and his audience, his interchange with the numbers of children who will have something to say must necessarily be abbreviated and fragmentary. Still, enlightenment need not be dull, nor communication superficial, provided the artist is himself clear in his intentions. The Arena Stage of Washington represents perhaps the happiest conquest of the hazards of an isolated visit. Veterans of nightly improvisational performances for general audiences, the Arena troupe spends its days in schools and its week-

ends in teachers' workshops. Experience has taught the troupe to reject engagements shorter than half a day or audiences larger than two hundred. Given this number, each member of the troupe will engage a group of ten children for approximately two hours in the creation of improvised roles and situations around themes suggested by the children themselves. For a final hour the entire group will reconvene so that adults and children together can perform for their fellows. Because the Arena company sees its purpose as teaching children to make dramatic art of their own experience, its members avoid censoring the children's themes. In racially tense Washington where most teachers are white and most students black, theirs could be a disastrous course. Instead, they have learned to coax from the incipient explosion itself the conception of art as a paring and shaping of life, an imposition of coherence on chaos. That they do so without preaching, almost without language itself, is a tribute both to their skill and to their art. Unhappily, the momentary transformation wrought by Arena Stage is rarely sustained by the schools it visits. Though the company may suggest what schools can aspire to, its brief performances cannot, after all, affect children deeply and permanently.

Like Arena Stage, the Teachers and Writers Collaborative of New York sends its members into conventional public schools to offer children an unconventional experience. But unlike the theater company, the Collaborative's teacher returns to his class once a week. He thus maintains continuity while escaping the invisibility which may cloak the resident artist; his arrivals become celebrations interrupting the weekly routine. In fact, he occupies much the same position as the art or music specialist supplied by the school system, with

the important difference that he is not a part of the system nor is he a certified teacher. Instead he is likely to be a young poet with a published volume or two to his credit, a growing reputation, and a serious commitment to his craft.

The Collaborative's teachers come into the classroom to help children write poetry. That they succeed, often beyond anyone's predictions, is substantiated anew by each issue of their monthly newsletter, which regularly displays samples of student work. Although suspicious of mechanically applied methods and sceptical, as poets will be, of generalizations, they have nonetheless evolved a loose technique which, in one variation or another, dominates the Collaborative's practice. Its elements will be familiar to readers of Herbert Kohl, a founder of the Collaborative, and to fans of the New York Review where Kenneth Koch recently described his classroom adventures:

> ...Rhyme is wonderful, but children generally aren't able to use it skillfully enough to make good poetry. It gets in their way. The effort of finding rhymes stops the free flow of their feelings and associations, and poetry gives way to sing-song. There are formal devices which are more natural to children, more inspiring, easier to use. The one I suggested most frequently was some kind of repitition: the same word or words ("I wish") or the same kind of thing (a comparison) in every line.....
>
> A poetry idea should be easy to understand, it should be immediately interesting, and it should bring something new into the children's poems. This could be new subject matter, new sense awareness, new experience of language or poetic form. I looked for other techniques or themes that were, like wishes, a natural and customary part of poetry. I thought of comparisons and then of sounds, and I had the children write a poem about each. As in the Wish Poems, I suggested a repetitive form to help give their poems unity: putting a comparison or a sound in every line.
>
> .....
>
> Some things about teaching children to write poetry I knew in advance, instinctively or from having taught adults, and

> others I found out in the classroom. Most important, I believe, is taking children seriously as poets .... Treating them like poets was not a case of humorous but effective diplomacy, as I had first thought; it was the right way to treat them because it corresponded to the truth. A little humor, of course, was left in. Poetry was serious, but we joked and laughed a great deal; it was serious because it was such a pleasure to write. Treating them as poets enabled me to encourage them and egg them on in a non-teacherish way -- as an admirer and fellow worker rather than as a boss.[3]

One clue to the Collaborative's success, manifest in Koch's remarks, is its desanctification of poetry. Koch relieves verse-making of the burden of holiness too often imposed on it by teachers whose reading ceased with Tennyson; he returns the poem to the world of discourse and to the arena of children's immediate concerns. At the same time his attitude is thoroughly practical; he sets forth without preconceptions to find a technique that works, and he tinkers about until he has found it. How much his search is aided by professional intuitions can scarcely be guessed, though they would seem to be crucial. While that fact magnifies the value of his insights for teachers who are not poets, it also underscores an important gap in the Collaborative's procedures. Explanation has been systematically ignored; no attempt has been made to understand, in logical or psychological terms, why one approach works and another fails, or even to examine what it means for a technique to "work". Doubtless it is unjust to accuse the Collaborative of slighting a task it never chose to undertake. Yet the neglect of so unique a fund of experience is surely regrettable. What that experience, diligently combed, might reveal about the sources of children's aesthetic capacities, their nature, development, and variation, needs to be known. As long as the Collaborative

[3]"Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry", The New York Review, XIV (April 9, 1970), 18-22.

continues to tinker without conceptualizing, its success must remain local and isolated, unexplained and unexplainable.

The Student as Apprentice

Both the open lab system and the introduction of professional artists into the classroom imply an acceptance of the school as a world unto itself. An opposing view, however, regards the school as an artificial, sometimes noxious enclave which, by isolating young people from the real business of life, unduly prolongs helplessness and dependency. Some argue further that teachers who merely teach, those whose sole occupation is schoolmastering, will never be taken seriously by adolescents since they lack the authority conferred by genuine achievement. John Holt is among those who have lately arrived at this view:

> .....What is most truly and deeply nutty about schools and schooling is not the idea that someone decides what and how and when someone else should learn something, or even the idea that all this should go on in a building shut off from the rest of the world, but the idea that learning should or can take place in an institution that doesn't produce anything but learning .....Any game, or puzzle, or activity, that is not worth the time and attention of the adults will soon be seen by the children as not being worth their time either. No one can get children truly interested in reading, or writing, or whatever it may be, who does not himself do these things regularly, and in their presence, and not for their good and pleasure but for his own.[4]

These two beliefs, taken together, underlie the "school without walls" exemplified by Philadelphia's widely imitated Parkway Program. Parkway has no classrooms of its own. Instead, its students learn science in research labs, mathematics in engineering or insurance offices, and languages in foreign consulates. And of course they study art history

[4]New Schools Exchange Newsletter, no. 36 (no date), p.2.

in museums, music in recording studios, writing in newspaper offices and television stations. Other smaller schools sometimes apprentice individual students to local master craftsmen. Although particular arrangements vary, there exists a common underlying intention: to evict the arts from schools, where they are alien and embarrassed, and to send children forth to encounter the artist on his own turf.

Where schools have failed to provide such opportunities, after-school alternatives are emerging. Their appearance is perhaps the newest wrinkle in aesthetic education. Saturday piano lessons are not, or course, strikingly novel; out-of-school instruction has long prevailed as the dominant pattern of training in the arts. But except for a gifted elite, those children lucky enough to discover the arts out of school generally did so under tutors whose accomplishments were pedagogical (or commercial) rather than creative. What is novel, then, is the inauguration of out-of-school centers where serious, committed artists stand ready to initiate children into their crafts. All of these, however, are still too new to permit evaluation. The Cherry Street Studio, for instance, came into existence earlier this spring and, for the present, remains only a building housing sixty painters, sculptors, and printmakers whose studios are always open to young people. The Voice of Children, a creative writing project, has expanded sufficiently in the last year to contemplate publication of a monthly journal. The Touchstone Center, an even more ambitious experiment in authorship now getting under way, expects to produce a journal of international children's writing. These endeavors all emanate from New York City, but rumors suggest that their counterparts on the west coast and elsewhere are already being planned.

Again, it is perhaps unjust to require of a new and precarious enterprise that it add to its other vexations that of systematic analysis and research. Yet fundamental questions need answering, and the day-by-day accumulation of events which might supply those answers may be difficult to recapture in later retrospective study. While the practical goals of these experiments merit applause, they need not preclude, as they now do, the equally worthy purposes of research and evaluation.

The Student as Teacher

Big kids have probably always taught little ones. In primitive societies they may be the primary tutors; in our own popular folklore the role of big brother, though invested with lofty condescension, will also require as its price some tutelary responsibility. Lately a convergence of events has sparked a new interest in the effectiveness of juvenile teachers. Among those events was Dolores Durkin's study of children who learned to read before entering school, a study which found that pre-schoolers had been instructed by siblings as often as by parents.[5] This discovery had already shaped the practice of some British infant schools where instruction in reading -- and in almost everything else -- proceeded very informally, relying less on teachers than on the willingness of peers to share their skills. Again, Ivan Illich has recounted the success of Spanish-speaking Harlem teenagers in teaching their native language quickly and efficiently to adult volunteers.[6] And experiments in cross-age tutoring in American public schools have suggested that tutors learn at least as much as their pupils from such an experience.

[5]Dolores Durkin, Children Who Read Early (N.Y., 1966).

[6]Ivan Illich, "Why We Must Abolish Schooling", New York Review, XV (July 2, 1970),12-13.

Much of this needs to be said only in order to be dismissed. Peer teaching in alternative schools -- and there is much of it -- proceeds from entirely different motives. It is the product not of a concern with the efficacy of teaching and learning, but rather the expression of allegiance to a cause. In fact, its symbolic importance may outwiegh its practical effects, for the student-as-a-teacher embodies an egalitarian principle high in the scale of free-school values. "All may learn and all may teach", proclaims one school's brochure, announcing its elimination of distinctions based on academic rank or achievement. Clearly, unless students are empowered to teach -- and moreover, to teach their teachers -- that proclamation will be hollow.

Proclaiming away all such distinctions, however, does not erase them. Perhaps it is a tribute to innate human modesty that the student who chooses to teach is, as a rule, one who has already achieved substantial competence. Since, in academic subjects, such expertise will be rare, the young instructor is likely to be teaching a performance skill -- typing, dressmaking, sports, auto repair, or one or another of the arts or crafts. At the Palfrey Street School in Watertown, an eighteen year old painter of great promise teaches a beginners' class of fellow-students. In an experimental school in Los Angeles, a sixteen year old guitarist joins with a literature teacher to offer a course in poetry and song. At the Murray Road School in Newton a high school filmmaker receives academic credit for teaching animation techniques at a nearby junior high. In many schools, individual tutoring or casual instruction in an open lab has grown so routine as to attract little notice.

But if in alternative schools and in conventional ones the rationale for peer teaching differs, its practical effects do not. The most

predictable of these is wretched teaching -- wretched, that is, if teaching is valued for its clarity, logic, and coherence. The young teacher does not begin at the beginning, does not proceed in sequence, does not define his terms or explain his assumptions or offer reasons for his judgments. He does not, in short, lay bare the workings of a mature intellect; patently, he cannot. Countervailing strengths, however, may offset these shortcomings. Not the least of his assets is enthusiasm. Scarcely a substitute for coherence when the instructor is an adult, enthusiasm may nonetheless count importantly in the young teacher. His obvious pleasure in his activity, his eagerness to pursue it despite recurrent and inevitable frustration. his patience and shrewdness, intensity and persistence, all provide that model of discipline and purpose so rare in free schools. Moreover, the young teacher's bumbling may lend his example extra weight: he is not so far ahead of his students that the gap appears forbidding. They rightly see him as one of themselves, distinguished from them by will and perseverance. Some surely must recognize, at least subliminally, the latent presence of those qualities in themselves, and the consequent possibility of a corresponding achievement.

The greater benefits, however, may accrue to the tutor. The worn observation that one learns his subject best by teaching it still nurtures a kernel of truth. Under the questioning of students, the teaching artist must seek words to describe habits, assumptions, and intuitions which lie on the fringes of awareness. He must, however incoherently at first, explain and justify what he is about. In the process of finding language for this peripheral knowledge, he brings it into focus, gains insight into his own procedures, and can alter or refine them voluntarily. He must also begin to formulate his own aesthetic,

to demonstrate why this is better than that, and to support his judgment with reasons sufficient to withstand his pupils' challenges. Assuming that critical self-consciousness is to be desired in the artist, this early training would seem invaluable.

Peer-teaching in the arts is an innovation of a different order from those described above. Less amenable to planning and more dependent on a spontaneous confluence of circumstances, it cannot be programmed into a curriculum. It need not, however, exclude other modes of instruction; in fact, it probably serves best as a supplement to a more nourishing diet. How rich a supplement it is remains to be discovered. Once again, its consequences need to be better understood, if only because it is a style likely to prevail for some time.

A final distinction -- between alternative schools on the one hand and, on the other, out-of-school alternative arts programs -- perhaps needs to be emphasized. For the most part the arts are withering in alternative schools, decisively in secondary though less irrevocably in elementary schools. Many alternative schools have traded the formalism of conventional institutions for an equally forlorn disorder. Theirs is an extreme response to desperate circumstances. But pessimism would be premature. Lively minds populate both camps; where they have attained influence, reform follows -- in the public schools, reform inspired by the experimenters, and in alternative schools, reform stimulated by students' incapacity to bear the burdens of self-determination. But reform is slow, and if despair is unjustified, impatience is not.

Alternative programs in the arts, however, are another matter. Whether operating, like the Teachers and Writers Collaborative, within schools ossified by habit and custom, or like the Cherry Street Studios, entirely outside the system, these approaches bring a new and welcome vitality to the teaching of the arts. Especially heartening is the readiness of practicing artists to bare their mysteries to children. If such programs flourish and multiply, they may yet undo the mischief of generations of schoolmasters.

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Harvard Project Zero is a basic research program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Its original charge was to study creation and comprehension in the arts and means toward better art education. A prime objective throughout the Project's history has been to provide a sound theoretical and experimental base for effective education of artists and audiences. The Project began in the fall of 1967 in response to the frank admission that, however much is known about how to educate in science and how to evaluate scientific work, practically nothing is known about the underlying principles of how to teach and evaluate in art. From that challenging "zero" the Project took its name and tasks. Our research methods include rigorous conceptual analysis, investigation of relevant literature, design and execution of key experiments in psychology and other fields, visits to arts education institutions, and application of results to proposing and assessing programs in art education.

Project founder and former director Nelson Goodman's book Languages of Art (Bobbs-Merrill, 1968) has provided important direction in our effort to isolate and investigate basic skills. This work sets forth a "theory of symbols," a broad treatment of elements of communication, embracing words, gestures, diagrams, paintings, poems, musical scores, and so on. Almost all the psychological processes under consideration in our studies of the arts involve extensive operation with and upon symbols of various kinds. These symbols are not merely instruments of communication, but also instruments of cognition, tools in terms of which the mind deals with the perceptual world.

Some of our research has examined the psychological implications of the theoretical models of symbol systems introduced in Languages of Art. For instance, one question is whether different information processing skills are necessary to produce effective art within linguistic, versus nonlinguistic, symbol systems. Another, complementary approach emphasizes problem solving and search strategies in the moment-to-moment perception and production of a work of art. How do subjects search for rhyme words in poetry or explore alternative placements of pieces in collage? A favorite means of developing and testing new models is through the study of errors. By using impoverished or ambiguous stimuli, assigning tasks somewhat too difficult for a subject, or working with brain-damaged subjects, one can elicit patterns of error-making which suggest hypotheses and select between alternative models of a process. These approaches characterize many of the Project's investigations mentioned below in a list of Project members and their particular interests.

Though the development of actual curricula in arts education is not a primary concern, the Project does contribute to the field of practical education. Project members have responded to inquiries and requests to comment on curricula from teachers in the field. Establishment of Harvard Summer School's Institute in Arts Administration resulted from the Project's reply to an inquiry from the director of the Harvard Summer School, and members of the Project staff cooperated in planning the Institute, in preparing material, and in the actual teaching. Consideration consultation has been provided to schools, museums, television, and a variety of arts institutions by members of the Project.

The Project has also sponsored a series of lecture-performances in various media, designed to give the general public and prospective public school teachers and administrators better insight into and attitudes towards artists and the arts. As the series title "Art in the Making" suggests, the purpose of the lecture-demonstrations was to reveal something of the artist's way of working, rather than to display his products. In the presence of an audience free to ask questions, each artist explored alternatives, exposed some constraints of his medium, compared his various efforts, and searched for the right effect, choice by choice.

While maintaining a major concern with the arts and art education, the Project, under its current co-directors, has considerably broadened its field of inquiry and now investigates a whole range of topics in the area of cognitive psychology. One part of the Project has focussed particularly on developmental studies. Among the topics currently being investigated are the emergence of symbolic capacities during the first years of life; the development of literary abilities, specifically the capacity to produce and appreciate metaphors and stories; children's understandings of the various worlds presented on television; the emergence of drawing skills; and the breakdown of various symbol using capacities under various forms of brain damage. The other part of the Project has concentrated on studies in the areas of cognitive and perceptual psychology, ones which utilize both normal adult subjects and gifted artists. Among the topics investigated recently have been critical judgment and the sources of critical disagreement in adults; the thought processes of professional and amateur poets and painters in developing works; the role of geometric principles in visual perception and picture perception particularly; reasoning about everyday matters and the logical difficulties people encounter.

A list of recent papers which can be purchased from the Project is available upon request.